

With the author's sanction
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LETTER

ON

THE STATE AND CONDITION

OF

APOTHECARIES;

WITH

PROPOSALS

FOR MAKING THEIR OFFICES MORE RESPECTABLE,
AND MORE BENEFICIAL TO THE PUBLICK.

ADDRESSED TO

PHARMACOPOLA VERUS,

BY A TRUE SURGEON.

"SALUS POPULI SUPREMA LEX."

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A LETTER,

&c. &c.

SIR,

THE publick and the practitioners of medicine are much indebted to you for a valuable pamphlet. I agree with you most heartily, in calling the attention of the Glass Bottle Committee to subjects of more important concern than the one for which they profess to be united ; but I differ from you in other views, and as I wish to give a helping hand to the good cause in which you have so worthily engaged, I shall use the press to exhibit my opinions.

I coincide with you in reprobating violent and impracticable schemes of medical reform, especially those in which the publick weal is not obviously a paramount feature, and your arguments against Chemists and unqualified persons acting as Apothecaries, are unanswerable. The dangerous economy of obtaining at the druggists' the medicines prescribed by

the Physician, requires a high insurance against mistakes and fraudulent sophistication, and I am at a loss to discover how the recommendation of such shops by Physicians and Surgeons, is reconcileable to the laws and known customs of the two Royal Colleges. But, Sir, we live in changing times, and if what I have to propose should appear to your prudent judgment, and to your experience of the world, an extraordinary innovation, you must attribute it to my zeal and firmness in wishing well to the profession.

I confess myself to be less concerned than you seem to be, about the hereditary claims of Apothecaries to carry on a lucrative trade, as the fit means of compensation for their services, their skill, their responsibility, and the expenses of their previous education. I do not consider a clandestine profit upon the sale of drugs, putting aside the *price of bottles*, at all a proper compensation for the charge and care of health and life. It has always been a source of distrust and dissatisfaction on the part of the publick, and it must consequently, as long as it is practised, operate as a degradation to a class of men, who are now and must ever continue to be, intrusted with

the health of the greater part of the community.

The relative offices of the Physician and the Apothecary, may be partly seen in the following quotation from the book of an enlightened Physician.

“ In the present state of physick, in this country,
 “ where the profession is properly divided into three
 “ distinct branches, a connection peculiarly intimate
 “ subsists between the Physician and the Apothecary;
 “ and various obligations necessarily result from it.
 “ On the knowledge, skill and fidelity of the Apothe-
 “ cary depend, in a considerable degree, the reputa-
 “ tion, the success, and usefulness of the Physician.
 “ As these qualities, therefore, justly claim his atten-
 “ tion and encouragement, the possessor of them me-
 “ rits his respect and patronage. The Apothecary
 “ is, in almost every instance, the *præcursor* of the
 “ Physician; and being acquainted with the rise and
 “ progress of the disease, with the hereditary constitu-
 “ tion, habits, and disposition of the patient, he may
 “ furnish very important information. It is in gene-
 “ ral, therefore, expedient, and when health and life
 “ are at stake, expediency becomes a moral duty, to
 “ confer with the Apothecary, before any decisive
 “ plan of treatment is adopted: to hear his account
 “ of the malady, of the remedies which have been ad-
 “ ministered, of the effects produced by them, and of
 “ his whole experience concerning the *juvantia* and
 “ the *lædientia* in the case. Nor should the future at-
 “ tendance of the Apothecary be superceded by the
 “ Physician; for if he be a man of honour, judgment,

“ and propriety of behaviour, he will be a most valuable auxiliary through the whole course of the disorder, by his attention to varying symptoms : by the enforcement of medical directions : by obviating misapprehensions in the patient, or his family : by strengthening the authority of the Physician, by being at all times an easy and friendly medium of communication*.”

You have very properly stated, that the Surgeons for the Army and Navy, and for the British Colonies, are reared by Apothecaries ; and you might with equal truth have added, that many of our most eminent Physicians and Surgeons have sprung from the same schools. But the odium of exorbitant profits must always attach to the mode of remunerating medical services, by a list of charges resembling the bill from a chandler's shop : nor do I perceive the benefit, or credit, to be derived from a more accurate system of huckstering about vials, since the publick have for a long time supposed, that the bottles of the Apothecary's shop are of more worth than their contents.

Your plan for immediate payment seems also to be objectionable : for it is often difficult to say, where sickness ends, and health

* Medical Ethics, by Thomas Percival, M.D. F.R.S. &c.

begins, and a hasty attack upon the purse after the afflictions of disease, would in many instances prove at least indecorous. The good old Christmas custom seems to me preferable for all parties.

It appears to me, Mr. Pharmacopola, that the art of Medicine has arrived at a sufficient degree of solid and practical knowledge, to stand on its own merits, and that it ought to cast aside all the unworthy tricks and concealments of an occult profession. I speak from more than thirty years of varied experience, during which I have associated with the whole fraternity in the metropolis, have looked at the several characters who figure in popular succession, and endeavoured to discriminate the tact and groundwork of each.

It should never be forgotten, that medical men are taken from the gross medley of society, and educated to gain a living by their profession. They are not *selected* on account of any early promise, or peculiar intellect, and must therefore be considered as an average group of mankind, with all their infirmities as well as good qualities, with all their vices and all their virtues. Thus constituted, let us see how the relative branches of the art

(for it is not a science) are initiated, and how they respectively develop themselves before the publick.

What are called the regular Physicians, are educated at Universities, where classical learning is especially cultivated and valued, and where lectures on physical science, moral philosophy, metaphysics, and the theory of medicine, are given, and in some of these seminaries, the practice of physick is displayed and taught in a publick hospital; but generally the practical observance of disease, and the effects of treatment are scantily exhibited at Universities, and especially at Oxford and Cambridge.

Unquestionably, the rudiments of a classical education enable the medical student to search the learned lore of books; unquestionably too, the culture of the intellects, by the routine of an university, is a valuable preparative for that nicety of observation, that discriminating power, and that deliberative judgment, which the art of medicine particularly requires: but learning may be of little avail in a sterile mind, and after all the forms of college duty, the tact and knowledge of treating diseases is an ulterior business. A man may be a

learned fool, or he may be idle, and not search into his profession with due diligence; or he may be in haste to get money, and impose himself, by various pretensions, on the credulous publick. These are well known truths. Some Physicians obtain an appointment to attend publick hospitals, and thus acquire practical information; many are obliged to content themselves with a course of pupilage exactly the same as that of the generality of Apothecaries; and some begin practice with no other qualification than the mere diploma. The claim of superiority is justly due to Physicians, when they are thoroughly instructed, and when the proper courses of study are grafted upon a vigorous understanding; but it must be admitted that many regular professors, are neither the wisest, nor the most liberal, nor the most faithful practitioners of their art; and, as society is constituted, it is impossible for them to superintend the diseases of the middle and inferior classes. Their pride, (and perhaps not an undue pride), forbids their accepting such fees as persons of moderate means have to offer, and patients of this description must necessarily fall into the hands

of the Apothecary, whose responsibility for their welfare and safety is equally binding with that of the Physician. It is therefore a matter of deep publick concern, that these supplementary Doctors of Medicine, should be duly qualified; and it would greatly add to their respectability, if they were examined, authorized and licensed by a competent Board, before they were permitted to exercise their vocation.

The practitioners of Surgery only are so few, that little need be said of them. They seldom interfere with the province of the Apothecary, and are more disposed to consider the Apothecaries as their brethren than the Physicians. Some unwise threats have been occasionally held out by Physicians, to restrict the office of the Surgeon to manual operations, and to prevent his prescribing for constitutional disorders: but the weakness of these projects must always yield to the necessity in Surgeons of the Army and Navy, and country practitioners, of combining the duties both of Physician and Surgeon. In truth, a Surgeon could not discharge his duty, unless he were often to take upon himself the office of a Physician; par-

ticularly in cases of mixed disease, where internal and external, local and constitutional disorders are blended, and where it would be impossible to transfer his views and purposes into the mind of a Physician. Even the fashionable subdivisions of surgery are not without disadvantages, for if an oculist or aurist, or a syphilitic Surgeon pretends to the exclusive study of one kind of disorder, he consequently debars himself the whole range of the rest; and experienced medical men, know the frequent dependance of one disorder upon another, and the difficulty of discriminating between them, unless an extensive scope of experience should have presented every kind to the notice of the practitioner.

The service of the publick must be our paramount consideration, or we sink into deserved contempt. Physicians, and Surgeons, and Apothecaries, would do well to adjust their jealousies, and abate their greediness. If they agreed together as a brotherhood, the world would respect the whole class more, and of course, pay them all both more willingly and more liberally.

I have thus in all sincerity made my preliminary *exposé* of the state and condition of

our art, and begging the reader's pardon for so much preface, I shall proceed to offer my plan for rendering the business of the Apothecary more honourable and profitable to himself, and more beneficial to the publick.

I would recommend an Association of twelve Apothecaries, six Physicians, and six Surgeons, to deliberate upon the respective Charters of the two Colleges, and that of the Company of Apothecaries. The individuals forming this Association, should be neither inexperienced, nor over-aged, should be liable to no improper motive from neediness, nor be sunk into apathy by prosperity. They should be men at the middle period of life, unexceptionable in their respective lines, and sufficiently versed in professional and worldly experience.

The Association being formed, I would recommend to them, to deliberate first upon the state of Apothecaries, and to examine how far the Charter of that Company will admit of needful changes, without infringing upon the Charters of the Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons, with a view to the framing of a new Charter, to be submitted to Parliament early in the next Session.

The Charter should extend to the forma-

tion of a Court of Examiners, empowered to grant legal authority for the practice of an Apothecary, and to prosecute all those who shall in future attempt to exercise that business without such authority. It should also give a right to Apothecaries to make a charge for their attendance, upon the same plan as Attornies have the right to charge. This mode of remuneration, is the radical and only remedy for the degradation of the Apothecary; it is even now customary with every country practitioner, who only rides a mile, and it would remove the disgust which every patient feels, who considers himself doomed to swallow nauseous drugs of suspicious necessity, for the sake of paying the Apothecary for his skill and trouble. Nor could this method of recompense become a source of jealousy to the Physician and Surgeon, if the sum for each visit were to be reduced below the fees which prescribing practitioners think themselves entitled to receive. If the Apothecary has been duly educated in the same professional schools with the Physician and Surgeon, he has surely a claim to some recompense for his responsibility, his skill and his attendance. I would however, recommend, that

when out of courtesy he meets the Physician and Surgeon to carry their wishes into effect, that he should be satisfied with the price of his medicines, and whatever *ad libitum* reward his patient may assign to such courtesy; but when he is left in charge, and is to exercise his judgment, or to act according to circumstances as they arise, he should be allowed a stated sum for his skill, the risque of his reputation, and his trouble.

Either Pharmacy must be raised above the condition of a retail trade, or it must remain in the sordid grovelling state to which it is at present reduced, exposed to the rivalry of every other shop-keeper. Impudence and avarice will push forward those who possess no other qualification, and whilst there is no test by which the publick may be guided, no distinction will be made between one dealer in drugs and another, save in that mysterious respect for the appearance of wealth, which carries full conviction (to the vulgar mind) of every other requisite quality being combined with it. As long as any man is entitled to set up for an Apothecary who can open a drug shop, as long as the publick are allowed to believe, that skill in administering physick

may be acquired from the practice of weighing and measuring drugs, so long will Pharmacy remain debased, insulted and ridiculed: and who can deny the justness of its fate?

To my apprehension, the due and authoritative establishment of Pharmacy as much affects the moral duties and the respectability of Physicians and Surgeons, as it does the Apothecaries themselves. It is impossible to prevent their practising all the branches of the profession, and it would be cruel and unjust to the publick to attempt it: such a scheme could never succeed, and the odium of the attempt would fall heavy on the narrow-minded projectors of it. Men in the medical profession must be satisfied with the rank which their learning, science, moral probity, sound sense and experience afford them; nor ought they to have any other claims to publick estimation or preference.

Medicine is followed merely as a lucrative business: it holds forth no honours to tempt ambition, and to check unworthiness, like the professions of the Law and the Church. At the close of life it gives little to the most faithful and most enlightened practitioner beyond self-approbation, a consciousness of

having discharged a toilsome duty, during a course of years, passed in witnessing the greatest of all human miseries. To some, the compensation of wealth and of independence for their family, consoles their declining years ; but this is the lot only of a few, and not unfrequently belongs to those who have pursued gain with all their might, regardless of every thing but external appearances.

The labour and anxiety of mind, the previous education, the heavy charge and responsibility of every class of medical men, render it highly just, that they should be paid according to the means of their employers, and the measure of their own experience and reputation. It is also just, that the health and lives of the middling class of society should be as well secured as the nature of human institutions will allow : and here I must again repeat, that the class of Apothecaries must be always the managers of sickness among the majority of individuals composing civil society, and that it is equally the duty and interest of all, to be assured of their competency. This security can, in my humble opinion, only be obtained from an authoritative body, empowered to ascertain

the qualifications of candidates, and to grant a license, no matter under what name, provided it gives the privilege to recover, in our Courts of Law, reasonable and stated charges for skill and attendance.

The prevalent diffusion of what is termed general knowledge, has undermined the great basis of medical mystery, and it would be well for the followers of that art, to be in advance with this progressive change. I will not say that fashionable or popular Lectures are calculated to give profound views, or perhaps to do much good ; but they have put medical men upon their mettle, in such elementary subjects as anatomy, chemistry and natural knowledge ; and it now behoves us all, both for ourselves and successors, to take a fair and honourable ground, and to stand before the publick, and by the side of other learned professions, on our real merits. The health and life of man is surely as valuable to him as any other concern, temporal and spiritual affairs being interwoven with both.

It is of no consequence to the diseased, by what designation the person is called, to whom his confidence is given, and his means are bestowed for his personal safety. The

reward for such responsibility should be equal to that of any other profession ; and it would be so, if medical men were as attentive to the real interests of their patients, as they are to punctilious distinctions and worldly gain. The discreditable bickerings about college etiquette, the disgusting false boastings of some diplomatised practitioners, affecting to outstretch their colleagues, and to cure incurable diseases, together with the flat contradictions of pretended practical writers, have brought an odium on the profession, which it may be very difficult to remove ; but there are, and always will be, men above the reach of such slanders, and to them belong the reformation and advancement of their art.

Some diseases are manageable to a moral certainty, and oftentimes by obvious means consistent with plain physical principles. A clear, ready and confident detection of the nature and tendency of a bodily disorder, and a candid explanation of the means to be employed, will invariably gain the confidence of the sufferer, and fill him with respect for his medical attendant. If the Apothecary were to be paid for his visit, he would occa-

sionally refrain from sending drugs, and carefully direct the diet of the diseased, which is always a principal concern; he would soon gain the same regard as the prescribing Physician and Surgeon, and be as certainly, and as civilly paid.

Those who have obtained but a moderate knowledge of human nature, will quickly perceive the uncertainty of a fair requital, when the pressure of disease and danger is over, and the unsatisfactory intercourse which must continue, after an affront passed upon reasonable charges. But if the rate of attendance was established by law, it would secure an amicable understanding throughout, and prevent the exorbitant demands of quacks and of rapacious practitioners, and become a standard for medical charges of all sorts. It is true, that most of the respectable families, who still retain the manners and feelings of our old English gentry, are in the habit of doubling the amount of the Apothecary's bill when it is paid; but this liberal custom is rapidly declining.

If medical men are serious in their wishes to advance the character of their profession, I would earnestly entreat them to consider

this subject deeply, and laying aside all unworthy motives, to unite in a generous and public-spirited manner, to establish their profession upon a respectable and rational footing, and to draw a line of demarcation between themselves and every species of dangerous empirics. Not but that there are, and will continue to be, quacks in all professions, and in every station of life; but in ours it is most notorious, and is so humiliating a stigma, that well-educated young men are ashamed to adopt the medical character. If a firm band of respectable Apothecaries, belonging, if possible, to the Company, will faithfully unite their efforts, and call upon a number of liberal and unexceptionable Members of the Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons, they may without difficulty, and with little hazard of ultimate success, draw up a plan for remodelling the Company of Apothecaries, and for a parliamentary authority to maintain their just privileges. There are good men, and evil-minded men, in all professions, and it is but fair to expect a number of steady, true, and liberal professors in the medical art, disposed to organize and support the claims of the Apothecaries. Popu-

lar favour is sure to be with them, and there is no rank in society who are not indebted to their services, and who do not continually entrust themselves and families to this class of medical men. Even a royal Physician in the highest favour, and a Serjeant Surgeon to the King, have both kept Apothecaries' shops, within the knowledge of us all.

These intimations for the improvement of the condition of Apothecaries, and for the greater security of the publick, would instantly assume a practical form, if submitted to the cool discussion of experienced and honest practitioners belonging to the three branches of the art. But as the proposal must appear indefinite, without some groundwork on which the discussion may proceed, I beg leave to submit the following suggestions:

That at a meeting of twelve regular Apothecaries, six regular Physicians, and six regular Surgeons, the Charter Laws and By-laws of the Royal Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons, and of the Company of Apothecaries, be read, and a day fixed, within the subsequent week, for the parties to meet again, each prepared by a due consideration of the previous documents, to appoint a Sub-

Committee to draw up the outline of a Bill for a New Charter for the Apothecaries, which, in addition to the present powers and offices of the Hall, shall present a plan for a Court of Examiners to grant licenses and legal authority to practice the art of the Apothecary ; that is, in plain terms, to legalize what has been and must ever continue, the charge and responsibility in the Apothecary, of visiting and treating sick and disordered persons, and to afford him a suitable compensation in money for every attendance.

In return for these benefits, if secured to him, the Apothecary should be expected to make no charge for his medicines ; and in case of his attending persons at a distance from his own residence, I would recommend, that he might transfer his prescription to the nearest Apothecary's shop, which would prove a liberal accommodation to all parties. If each visit were to be charged at the rate of only five shillings for affluent persons, and three shillings for tradesmen, it would prove a reasonable compensation for the trouble ; and as an acknowledgment for skill, and superseding perhaps a packet of drugs, it could not fail to please the patient.

As a means of improving the beneficial part of the art, this method would be extremely useful, since it would lead the practitioner to bestow more attention upon the diet and other regimen of disordered persons ; and by this being more strictly attended to, a candid sincerity would show itself on his part, which would soon convince every class of the publick, not only of the real usefulness of the art, but of the value derived from compensating professional visits. It must often occur to every medical man, to have to visit persons who labour under no other disorder than what arises from error of diet, and on the plain directions for a wholesome change, all his skill must rest.

I appeal to all men, professional and unprofessional, whether an honest practitioner thus conducting himself, is not worthy of his hire, and whether such conduct would not be more laudable than the mystery of formal prescription, and the total reliance upon the unaided efficacy of drugs.

I am fully aware that enough of the leaven of quackery still remains, even among those who possess a full scope of vulgar fame, and who have been enriched, and are still greedy of riches, through the channel of professional

mystery. Such men are very ready to urge the humanity of concealing the uncertainties of medicine from their distressed patients. If however a profession which has been cultivated separately from others for more than two thousand years, and of which the most ample records are now extant, is still to rest upon a sort of fraudulent concealment, it is unworthy of the public regard. But I insist, that it has become a solid, practical and useful art, and that it's honest and duly informed practitioners, may with moral certainty, cure, or alleviate, many diseases, which if left to their natural courses would prove fatal, and that the preventive art of medicine, and the knowledge of valetudinary regimen, are of the highest value. I insist that many of our methods of treatment are founded in physical science, and reduced to physical certainty, and that the art will be still further advanced by doing away the deceits and mysteries, and the occult pretensions, which are too often assumed to impose upon the world, as substitutes for more substantial knowledge for common sense, and for moral integrity. The "lo here, and lo there," of the medical art, is more imposing than that of any other

profession. Desperate pretenders astonish the vulgar, and “push from their stools” the more mopish diplomatists, no matter under what plea of superiority; though it is usually some popular cry of extraordinary depth in anatomy, in chemistry, in Greek or Latin, in cutting at all hazards, in some incomprehensible skill to ferret out a particular disease, perhaps in the *liberal* recommendation of a nostrum. These and similar disgraceful arts, have raised the cry of medical popularity, to its shame and injury, and to the fatal misleading and mischief of the deluded public. It is the equal interest and duty of us all to establish a good name, and to reform our defects and unworthy habits. We are inseparably tied together in public opinion, and we must rise or fall by our mutual conduct. The unlicensed and unauthorised pretensions of Apothecaries, give rise to infinite imposture, and the public will never regard the Members of Royal Colleges, or respect their superior claims, if such members have sprung from a class of men possessing no legal privileges, and no regular authority for the exercise of their art. They will continue

to think, as many now ignorantly do, that medical skill is a peculiar gift, resembling inspiration, or that it depends upon the possession of secret methods and nostrums. The publick should be distinctly informed, that medicine is built upon clear and substantial elementary foundations, and that the full scope of anatomy, and chemistry, and natural knowledge, is equally attainable by all men of common understanding ; that afterwards, experience in witnessing diseases and their treatment, can alone make competent practitioners ; and that on the extent of that experience, and on the clearness of apprehension and soundness of the judgment of individuals, must alone depend their claims to superiority.

If the pupils or apprentices of Apothecaries have served an initiation of five years, in witnessing the effects of medicines, and observing the successful or contrary result in the practice of Physicians and Surgeons ; and if they are afterwards instructed by lectures on the practice of physick, on materia medica, on anatomy, and chemistry, and attend the practice of a publick hospital ; what objection can be possibly raised against their competency ? and why should not these pro-

bationary studies, and the result of them upon the intellect, be publicly recorded, and the Apothecary, thus qualified, be licensed by the seniors of his fraternity, and legally entitled to a charge for his skill and attendance? If this plan be not in substance adopted, the publick must consider Apothecaries as clandestine practitioners, and as traders in drugs, with a constant propensity to sell as much as they can, no matter whether harmless or active, for sordid gain. Whereas the just pretensions of regular Apothecaries give them a higher title; and there are many Physicians and Surgeons sufficiently generous to support them in it. The pride of some Physicians and Surgeons, and the meanness of others, ought to be no bar to the honest claims of the Apothecary. He ought to allow every fair ground of superiority to the better educated Physician and Surgeon, but he should insist on an open acknowledgment of his own fitness to exercise his art, according to a custom which seems to be unalterable, upon exhibiting proper credentials.

In an appeal of this sort, it would be improper to rake up any of the shameful disputes and criminations, which have so often

disgraced medical literature; but it would, at the same time, be unjust to refrain from telling the publick, that several regular Physicians and regular Surgeons, have been lately detected in sharing the profits of retail drug shops. If the Members of the Royal Colleges shall fail to purify themselves from such unworthy practices, let them be cautious at least how they attempt to impede the reasonable and public claims of a class of men, proving themselves to be duly qualified, casting off the odium of being unprincipled dealers in physick, and asking only a just compensation for their services.

Though I have already trespassed upon the reader in this full disclosure of my opinions, it may not be useless, on parting with him, to observe, that his present addressor has no direct or indirect share or interest in the business or success of any Apothecary. He is induced to write, solely from a feeling of compassion towards an injured and degraded class of his brethren, and from an earnest desire to render the profession more useful to the publick and more respectable in itself. That the interests of health and the preservation of life, should be committed to any other

than duly qualified and fitly authorised persons, is a monstrous absurdity ; and that the charge and responsibility of such serious concerns, should not be as respectfully paid as the administration of worldly property, is equally absurd. Common sense, common honesty, and common humanity, are at variance with the present condition of the Pharmaceutical art, and the publick, and the whole of the medical profession, join in calling aloud for a substantial, practical, and permanent remodelling of this indispensable branch of physick.

